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Hard-Working Hamilton Built Power While Keeping Low Profile

By ROBERT C. TOTH, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—Lee H. Hamilton, the veteran Democrat named Wednesday to head the special House committee that will investigate the Iran arms sale controversy, is a crew-cut Hoosier with great legislative influence based on 22 years of hard work, moderate positions and little inclination to seek publicity.

Only after 20 years in Washington did he call his first press conference here. And even in the last two years, despite his position as chairman of the powerful House Select Committee on Intelligence, Hamilton is largely unrecognized outside the Capitol.

The Indiana congressman in recent weeks has accepted more invitations for television appearances in an apparent effort to show Democratic skeptics that he could be an effective chairman of the select committee if chosen for it.

Nonetheless, some of his liberal colleagues still fear that his low-key approach will allow the House committee to be overshadowed by the parallel Senate investigating committee headed by Sen.

Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii).

"He's not flamboyant," said Rep. George E. Brown Jr. (D-Colton), a member of the intelligence committee, "and he works by conciliation rather than confrontation."

Brown, like many of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle, expressed "the very highest admiration" for Hamilton, and others said his even-handedness and good judgment make him well qualified for the sensitive post.

Opponent of Contras Aid

Hamilton's voting record indicates that he is marginally liberal but as he once quipped in an interview, "we are either conservatives or moderates"—not liberals—in his Republican-dominated state.

In the House, Hamilton has been an opponent of U.S. aid to Nicaragua's *contras*. Some congressmen believe that, without being as vocal, he has been more effective than some other contra aid critics in reining in Administration covert actions in Central America.

The tall, boyish-looking Hamil-

ton, 55, comes from a religious family—his father and a brother are Methodist ministers. He was a high school basketball star in Evansville, attended DePauw University on a tennis scholarship and, after studying briefly in West Germany, received his law degree from Indiana University. He is married and has three children.

While his family is staunchly Republican, Hamilton was attracted to the politics of John F. Kennedy and was elected to Congress in Lyndon B. Johnson's landslide in 1964. His election victory margins have steadily increased, peaking at 72% this year.

Hamilton's colleagues believe that his ambitions stop at becoming chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee—he is now the second-ranking Democrat on that body—although noting that the exposure that his new job will bring could affect his goals.